Thesis Advisor: Frank Martignetti

Deconstructing Gender in the Elementary String Classroom

by Katherine D'Angelo

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Abstract:

At the elementary level, gender roles play a large part in shaping children's current and future music education. Research demonstrates, that by fifth grade, children beginning instrumental instruction choose an instrument based on the perceived gender of the instrument (MacLeod, 2009). Perceptions of gender when choosing an instrument are constructed, in part, by the examples found in a child's social environment. Through social pressure, modeling, and expressed gender conformity, children receive very clear messages about the social mores expected of their specific gender as well as those for the opposite gender. Following these elusive, and sometimes arbitrary, masculine, and feminine social mores, including stereotypes about music making, children can easily conform and miss out on new musical experiences and skills, thereby limiting their potential. It is essential to create an environment where children see different examples and possibilities so they can construct a new vision for themselves and not be constrained by social mores. Through pedagogical practices, modeling, music selection, and communication, teachers can challenge these constructed gender roles. This is crucial to create limitless possibilities so that children are not limited by a socially constructed norm. If that limitation is removed, children are then free to create a new idea of self in a gender sensitive environment.

Why Gender Roles in Music Education?

Introduction

I am an elementary strings specialist in an affluent suburb of New York City. I see many patterns in my classroom. One of the most glaring is a relationship between instrument selection and gender. Very few boys play the violin, and very few girls play the cello or bass. Many boys feel like the violin is too small, high sounding and feminine, and girls feel the same about carrying a cumbersome, masculine string bass. (Baker, 2012). It all seems very innocuous, perhaps even sweet, but as I observe this dynamic again and again, one truth keeps gnawing at me; many (though not all) of these students did not actually choose their instrument freely—it was chosen for them, as a result of constructed social gender mores and rules. This, to me, is unacceptable. One does not have to look far to see the pull that conformity exerts. Through the clothes that they wear, the music they listen to, the shows that they enjoy, youth perform notions of gender. Nicola Dibben's (2002) research suggests that, due to the various cultural expectations of women and the division of labor, it is logical to think that socialization and the environment play an important role in gender identity. String instruments take significant time and energy to play well, and I wish that each child could choose with fewer cultural constraints. This is a challenge.

Music plays a crucial role in the identity of a child or adolescent. Simon Frith (1981) indicated that children wear their musical tastes as a "badge" where they can project their identity to the world. Once children grow into adolescence, they watch less television and start listening to music with peers (Beegle et al, 2007). Music becomes inextricably linked with identity and social life: "From the perspective of 'performative' theories of gender, engagement in musical practices may construct and sustain individual or collective identity" (Dibben, 2002,

p. 120). In her study of adolescents and the many meanings that music has for their lives, Beegle finds that music teaches and connects students with their cultures and cultural practices (Beegle et al, 2007). Adolescents also express and carry out their social life through music. Beegle also points out (p. 228) that music is a tool and coping mechanism in dealing with trauma in adolescence. Musical-social connection with peers, self-identity development, cultural expression, and therapeutic tools—it is clear that music is central to adolescents both personally and inter-personally. Dibben states that "identity is something we *do* rather than something we are" (Dibben, 2002, p.120). Through our interactions with others, we are developing our identity, and we are actively shaping our identity throughout adolescence. Therefore, participation in school- based music education is an important experience in the life of children and adolescents, one that can help shape their identity, and also their personal construction of gender. It is clear that music is both the problem and the solution. If taught incorrectly and with the wrong approach, it can solidify gender roles. However, if music is explored and introduced in its varied forms, it can open the mind to new experiences and thoughts.

Purpose of the Study

In this action research study, I aim to provide students with the tools to deconstruct gender bias in the music classroom. Through using communication and critical pedagogy techniques inspired by the work of Paolo Freire, I will be teaching students how to begin to think critically and question unexamined views of gender. I hope the students will apply their newly developed critical thinking skills to other areas as well, including the music which we play. The research for this study is comprised of a review of the literature on gender and music education; my own reflections on how to improve my teaching practice and help students to deconstruct unexamined assumptions about gender, and suggestions for myself and other teachers to

implement. The study concludes with four lessons that introduce the student to the new experience of co-creating an environment where they are an active part of the class, rather than an inactive participant. Once they learn some age-appropriate critical thinking techniques, we then apply it to gender. At this point they have started the process of honing the skills needed eventually to critically think on their own, which is the goal. Through this work, students will be able to deconstruct gender bias in the music classroom, but they can also deconstruct other biases elsewhere. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, I was not able to teach these lessons in 2020-2021. I plan on teaching them next academic year, refining them, and look forward to sharing results with my colleagues. This action research study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What pedagogical approaches best deconstruct gender roles in the elementary string classroom?
2. How can I utilize these approaches in an accessible way with my students?

Method

This is a qualitative action research study, where I reflect on my professional practice and plan to carry out future action research in my classroom. Action research is a method in which participants use research tools to analyze their own educational practice systematically and carefully (Phillips, 2013). While there are several different forms of research that can be performed, action research refers to a disciplined investigation conducted by a teacher with the goal of informing and changing his or her teaching practices in the future. This study is conducted in the framework of the teacher's working environment; the research is conducted with the students at the school where the teacher works. In an action research study, we first identify the problem, gather data, interpret data, act on evidence, evaluate results, and take our

next steps (Philips, 2013). As teachers we ask ourselves the question- how can we grow as teachers and impact students in a positive way? This is the goal of an action research study in music education.

This study will involve twenty fourth grade students who are participating in orchestra. Because I am reflecting on my own professional practice, surveying the available research literature, and trying new pedagogical approaches with my own students, no approval from the University of Bridgeport's Institutional Research Board (IRB) was necessary. Data from this study includes my own observations and reflections as a teacher; next academic year, I will implement these lessons, adding student responses to questions asked to this data set. I have provided a draft of these lessons in Appendix A. The heart of this thesis lies in the available literature.

Literature Review

Gender in the Music Classroom: What is happening?

Traditional gender roles are very clearly entrenched in our school systems, including in music rooms. Students, for various reasons, choose instruments that they perceive as male or female. (Kelly, 1997) They are shown, and then told, through various channels which instruments are masculine or feminine, and they accordingly pick an instrument that they identify as male or female. For example, boys tend to pick the saxophone or drums, and girls pick the flute or the violin. Some also choose the instrument based only on sound. Girls pick higher sounding instruments while boys pick those that sound lower. (Kelly, 1997). The timbre of an instrument is also a huge factor in understanding gender bias in the music classroom. Abeles and Porter (1978) found that the harp, flute, violin, and clarinet are typically viewed as female, whereas drums, trombone, and trumpet are considered male. So, the higher sounding instruments are deemed feminine and the lower sounding instruments are deemed masculine. There are also many assumptions that are made about masculine versus feminine instruments. Musicians who play feminine instruments are seen as "sensitive" and "caring," while musicians playing masculine instruments were described with masculine descriptors, such as "leader" and "dominant" (Cumberlege, 2018). Lucy Green (2002) observes that participation in classical or choral music really challenges the masculinity of a boy: "Just as girls negotiate a feminine gender identity through music, so boys negotiate a masculine gender identity" (Green, 2002. p.139). The pressure for students to maintain society's gender norms is central to the elementary experience.

Rachel Macleod was interested in the way that children perceive instruments. In her study, one group of students viewed pictures of different instruments, and the other only heard

sounds. There was no significant difference between the two in how students rated the instruments. These results, however, showed that by the fifth-grade, typical instrument gender biases are more prevalent. Third grade boys rated the flute as their first preference, but in fifth grade it became their last preferred instrument, and the saxophone went to number one (MacLeod, 2009). In this community, the students all learned, somehow, by fifth grade, that males were not supposed to like the flute. It bears mentioning that these students are limiting the many possibilities at their disposal, simply because of this social perception. It is a powerful thing and can affect their entire musical experience. Looking at post-secondary music studies, and students' trajectory through them, helps assess the effects of these expectations absorbed at a much younger age, and where we, as educators are doing good or harm.

It is clear at the elementary level that students enact societal views on gender in the music classroom. At the collegiate level, the continued presence of gender bias demonstrates that this is an ongoing, and long-term, issue. Kathleen McKeage studied 628 students attending fifteen different college programs and explored their participation in both high school and college jazz ensembles (McKeage, 2004). This study explored whether gender affected students' participation and experience with jazz. Male and female students were equally represented. At the start of the study, students first discussed their participation in jazz ensembles in both high school and college. Students then explored their relationship with gender in the jazz ensemble setting. Next, they identified differences in their individual ensemble experience based on gender. Finally, McKeage explored why those who quit jazz band did so. The results were very clear. While 62% of men who played jazz in high school played in college, just 26% of women who played jazz in high school played in college. The findings also showed that both gender and jazz participation status affected attitudes toward jazz in general. Finally, the women who quit

stated that they felt their instrument choice was better suited to traditional bands and orchestras, and they did not see jazz in their future as a musician. McKeage proved without a doubt that women in jazz are not given the encouragement that they deserve, or the opportunity to join the "boys club," as many call it (McKeage, 2004). In the early twentieth century, women were excluded from marching bands and were further alienated from jazz ensembles and orchestras (Curtis, 2017). Jazz is "thought of and historicized as a 'man's world,' sometimes decorated by 'girl singers'" (Tucker, 2016, p. 256). Without encouragement and a shift, the number of women in these fields will never be equal to the number of men. It is doubly hard—as women need to negotiate a position in a typically masculine culture—on top of attaining proficiency at their instrument. It bears saying here that in music education, band teachers in the middle and high school levels all have some jazz component in their teaching that is required. Encouraging instrument choice and showing students various and diverse role models is key for encouraging female jazz musicians.

There is also research that indicates that behavioral stereotyping does occur and is closely related to gender bias. (Cumberledge, 2018) Musicians who play a certain type of instrument are often stereotyped based on opinions about that particular instrument. Example: Drummers are all wild party-goers, and string players are neurotic. This type of stereotyping is more prevalent in older students in high school, college, and beyond. Cumberledge studied college aged students and their opinions or stereotypes of other musicians. Male flute players were called successful, sensitive, and caring; female flute players were called, sensitive, caring, and introverted. (Cumberledge, 2018) Gender stereotypes are clear here. The male flutists are successful, while a woman playing the same instrument is introverted. The results for the tuba were also very interesting. Male tuba players were labeled as followers, weak, and uncaring; female tuba players

were seen as dominant, leaders, and successful. (Cumberledge, 2018) The tuba results align with the idea that female musicians who play a masculine-labeled instrument are seen as strong and powerful. It seems throughout the literature that women who venture out and play instruments perceived as male are more accepted than males playing instruments perceived as feminine. Moving forward, it would be prudent and ethically helpful to take behavioral stereotyping into account as it plays a direct role in gender perception and bias amongst musicians.

Lucy Green actually studied music teachers and their perceptions of students, and the results are dramatic. Green studied seventy-eight secondary music teachers and their opinions of the musical abilities of both boys and girls in their music programs. Sixty-four of the seventy-eight teachers ticked a box indicating that girls were the 'most successful' at singing, and none ticked boys. (Green, 2002) They also noted that girls sang, because it was seen as a girl's activity (Green, 2002). Teachers also commented that instrument choice enhances femininity, expressing emotions, or evoking a feeling of being more delicate. "Overall, girls were seen to *conform* to the teacher's and school's values, expectations, and standards of behavior" (Green, 2002). Despite their comments about boys only liking popular music, the teachers had some striking comments about composition. They saw boys as excelling in composition, as they viewed them as more innovative, more daring, and more artistic. In comparison, they saw girls as sluggish and without imaginative spark (Green, 2002).

Green compares this response to musical composition with a study on Mathematics and gender (Walkerdine, 1990). Here Walkerdine shows that girls were *constructed* as failing, through being attributed with qualities such as perseverance, obedience, and commitment to work, which were then used as *causal explanations* for their failure: as examples of lack of autonomy, creativity, and initiative (Green, 2002). When girls did succeed, this was attributed to

rule-following and rote-learning, which were distinguished from and even opposed to the concept of understanding. But 'naughty' boys could 'break set', think independently, 'reason'. Thus, even though their actual attainment may have been poor, they were seen to 'understand' properly (Green, 2002, p.140).

To me, this is the most tragic discovery. That girls are almost set up to be seen as not successful at composition, due to attributes placed upon them by the social structure they inhibit. This type of musical practice needs to be addressed. A teacher should have sound judgement when addressing the strengths of students. It is clear that the teachers in this research studied in the systems that I have discussed earlier in this paper which directly resulted in their reinforcing of gender stereotypes in music. To reiterate Macleod, it is clear that gender bias starts earlier than fifth grade, and is perpetuated in the music classroom, producing teachers who then continue the cycle. In order to break this cycle, we as teachers need to switch up our teaching practices, listen, and communicate differently.

What pedagogical approaches best deconstruct gender roles in the elementary string classroom?

Communication At the heart of this research, one common thread has continued to pop up: communication: the words that we choose, the words that are spoken, and the words that are unspoken. Music educators often, consciously, or unconsciously, maintain a very Eurocentric, patriarchal focus. So much of music taught in our music classrooms, especially classical music, was composed by white, European men. It is extremely easy to fall into the classics and not delve into the music of other composers. The key to changing this is communication. It is the most crucial pedagogical tool that we can use to help us to deconstruct gender bias, along with other biases, in any classroom setting. Here, we will explore

communication from many angles. In looking towards a gender sensitive environment, communication is key to keeping a safe space for students. The ways in which both students and teachers communicate with each other can either hinder or help to create a gender sensitive environment. In her research on communication in the music classroom, Teryl Dobbs includes various assumptions, this one being very pertinent here: "the use of language influences the manner whereby people think about music, shaping their musical reality" (Dobbs, 2008, p.140). It is agreed, as Dobbs states, that musical realities are built and shaped by the language that is spoken or sung in the classroom environment. Therefore, language and communication are crucial to deconstructing gender in the music classroom.

There are some interesting dynamics in how children communicate, and how female and males communicate with each other. Research on this topic can give teachers a window into how to communicate appropriately to deconstruct gender in the classroom. Many researchers have arrived at the fact that American boys and girls learn different ways of speaking by age five (Maltz et al., 1982). Maltz and Borker stipulate that social interactions are learned through play in homogeneous groups of all boys or all girls: "The process can be profitably compared to accent divergence in which members of two groups that wish to become clearly distinguished from one another socially acquire increasingly divergent ways of speaking" (Maltz et al., 1982). In these stages of development, boys and girls attempt to exaggerate their differences, and speech is a very important element. This is also how stereotypes are learned. If boys and girls learn to interact with each other so differently, then it is inevitable that there are going to be miscommunications and different ways of expression. The play and speech of girls is extremely complicated, but Maltz and Borker sum it up: "What girls learn to do with speech is cope with the contradiction created by an ideology of equality and cooperation and a social reality that

includes difference and conflict" (Matz et al., 1982). The play and speech of boys in a nutshell is to express dominance, attract others, and maintain their dominance over other speakers (Maltz et al., 1982). These are drastically different paradigms, and it is no wonder that communication issues come up later in life. Maltz and Borker also do suggest (p. 215) that "gender related behavior" is not something learned over a long period of time but *unlearned* as an adult. They contest that the gender differences are stronger and more heightened in childhood, and that some will be overcome in time. This research highlights the importance of communicating effectively in the classroom in order to deconstruct gender bias.

Joseph Abramo (2011) explores how high school students rehearse popular music together. Abramo researched how student gender affected participation in an optional music class in which students formed a band where they composed and performed unique music. Three same-gendered rock bands and two blended-gendered rock groups rehearsed for 16 months. Observations from the rehearsals and interviews were documented in field-notes and audio recordings. These findings suggested that the popular music practices of the participants varied between girls and boys. The largest difference between the groups was their musical processes, how they actually composed and rehearsed. In the boy group, the members of the band used rehearsal techniques recorded in previous research on popular music and education; they interacted through musical movements and supplemented it with a musical gesture when conversing through verbal language (Abramo, 2011). Conversely, the girl group members divided their verbal and musical contact, while choosing to create clearly delineated episodes of dialog and play (Abramo, 2011). The girls used processes historically unknown in popular music teaching research. Beegle et al have noted that girls experience the emotions of music, and connect with lyrics, while boys have been researched as wanting their music choice to project an

image to peers (Beegle et al., 222). The mixed gender group experienced frustration due to different preferred processes which resulted in frustration and miscommunication among the students. Abramo proposes that we have too singular a view of how students should interpret and learn music, and that the widely held view of how students learn is only how the male students learned (Abramo, 2011). Abramo discusses the pedagogical implications of presenting various processes to all students in the classroom, and he calls for future research on particularly female students' musical processes. If boys and girls learn differently at this age, then that affects their musical experience, and the teaching modalities used should not only represent the "male" way of learning.

Teryl Dobbs studied the role of communication in her instrumental lessons as a band teacher. Obviously, language is one of the main elements in teaching and learning, and it has a place in the music classroom. However, because some of what we do as musicians cannot truly be described with words, there is a point where we can question the usefulness of language in a performance setting (Dobbs, 2008). Can we minimize speech and communicate musically, and thereby would that create a more gender sensitive approach? Perhaps. Dobbs uncovers various physical gestures in her research. There were three that were used with great regularity: conducting gestures, vocable performance gestures, and instrumental music performance gestures. (Dobbs, 2008) She refers to these as "paralinguistic gestures." (Dobbs, 2008) This means that the gesture takes the place of any verbal direction. It is the goal as musicians to perform music and eventually only use paralinguistic gestures and communicate through the music without explanation. It is amazing to see a player who understands the movement and nuance of another player, and who can react to them without speaking or giving verbal instruction. I think using our bodies through gesture to communicate, is an amazing avenue that

is worth exploring. Just seeing what a conductor can communicate to his/her ensemble is awe inspiring. The amount of communication that occurs without speaking is limitless. I have explored nonverbal techniques, mostly in behavior management. There were times I have tried to teach a silent lesson, and I found it to be very powerful. Paralinguistic communication is one area that might be very useful in combating gender bias in the music classroom. It eliminates persuasive dialog about instruments or pieces and leaves the student with just the music. When music is what is left, it becomes the focus and not any extra "spin" or opinions about it remain, other than the performer's internal feeling. It would be interesting to see if an instrument demonstration involving paralinguistic communication versus normal talk would result in different instrument choices.

Self- Talk

Self-talk also plays a role in deconstructing gender and is another level of communication worth exploring. The term stereotype threat has been coined to describe a host of academic performance issues in the classroom. According to Claude Steel, stereotype threat is a self-measuring threat that appears when an individual is at risk of confirming a negative stereotype about themselves. Steel has extensively studied stereotype threat's effect on African Americans' test performance. Steel has determined that stereotype threat, even the mention of being African American on a test for information, impaired performance on academic work. (Steel, 808) The belief system that the students carried personally affected their performance. As teachers we need to challenge stereotype threat and help students to challenge these beliefs.

There is ample research on gender and academics regarding stereotype threat: in physical education, the sciences, math, and even age. In 2007, Mary C. Murphy, Claude Steel, and James J. Gross published a study that measured physiological vigilance of male and female participants

while they were being exposed to either gender un-balanced or gender balanced videos. This study centered on female math, science, and engineering students. Simple effects tests revealed that women who watched the unbalanced gender video showed greater increases in sympathetic activation of the cardiovascular system then women who watched the balanced gender videos. The study shows that potentially stigmatized groups are greatly affected by situational signs that indicate the possibility of identity threat in an area. Thus, for groups that may be vulnerable to stereotype threat, the way an environment is structured has essential significance and effect. "As we have shown, when a setting contains threatening situational cues, it raises the specter of identity threat—prompting heightened cognitive and physiological vigilance, decreased feelings of belonging, and decreased desire to participate in the setting." (Murphy, Steel, et.al, 884). Self-communication and self-identity are crucial aspects of deconstructing gender bias in the music classroom.

Critical Based Instruction

Traditional classrooms are often predicated on the concept of the *banking model of education,* where "the instructor is positioned as the conveyor of knowledge and students are expected to passively receive information." (Ochoa and Pineda, 2008, p. 46) The banking approach is almost like the mute button being pressed for each student, and there is not a symbiotic relationship between the teacher and the student. The power is one sided.

This banking concept was coined by Brazilian teacher Paulo Freire, who taught illiterate adults to read Portuguese. He is the father of critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy arose as an educational answer to the world's injustices, disparities, and oppressive power dynamics (Talbot, 2019). The banking system is the paradigm that is most typically seen in the classroom. It consists of mostly one-way teacher talk, where open discussion between teacher and student does

not take place. Students are taking a passive role and are not encouraged to critique what they are being taught—no questioning. "When students are treated as empty receptacles into which knowledge is deposited, what they know, and experience is often devalued and disregarded." (Ochoa &Pineda, 2008, p.46). The banking system does not have room for critical thinking, or even reflecting. It does not inspire, and while students may learn extra knowledge, they have not received any tools for critical thinking or intrinsic motivation to learn. So, if the material taught in the banking approach manor is biased, then the students are not taught to challenge it, but rather to accept it. This aligns with music as well. If you are always performing and listening to the same type of music, then the students have no means of questioning or asking what other types of music might be available to them. The banking approach is a vehicle for continuing a cycle of bias, in any form.

Even when teachers are trying to have a student-centered classroom where communication is encouraged, there are still pitfalls. In many cases, white male students speak more frequently, call out more, and speak for longer periods of time than minority students or female students. It is still possible for a teacher attempt at student centered learning to fail, allowing the focus of the class to be a middle class, white, male centered environment. In the music classroom this can happen as well, both in music selection, and the students who volunteer to perform or model for the class. There are different critical pedagogy practices that can be used to help alleviate these inequities. Ochoa and Pineda (p. 47) suggest the sociological imagination approach of teaching students critical thinking where they "deindividualize problems," and instead look at the wider social, class, and economic perspectives. Sociological imagination is the practice of being able to "think ourselves away" from the familiar routines of our daily lives to look at them with fresh, critical eyes, and is coined by the sociologist C. Wright Mills. Ochoa

and Pineda also recommend teaching conflict theories to enact critical thinking. In particular they value Chicana/o studies "that challenges dominant perspectives, focuses on the societal factors influencing Chicanos/as and Latinos/as, emphasizes social change research and scholarship, and valorizes knowledge from personal experiences and family histories." (Ochoa &Pineda, p.48). This type of critical thinking can be applied to gender as well as ethnicity. This can be applied to the music classroom as well. Questioning where the music came from and from what time and place, using music that is important to the culture and life of the student, and creating a space where dominant perspectives are challenged. Teaching students to look at things with critical eyes helps to challenge any bias in the classroom.

In my research on communication, I stumbled across the concept of critical literacy pedagogy. Critical literacy pedagogy proposes that students are able to apply a critical viewpoint to their lives through cultivating skills of challenging, criticizing, and inquiring in order to consider and consciously deconstruct socially established norms present in the environment around them. (Birner, 2016). Students need practical tools in order to achieve the skills required to question ingrained societal systems. "Within an elementary school classroom context, a critical literacy framework could help marginalized students become empowered as they develop a repertoire of words and practices for deconstructing texts." (Birner, 2016, p.60). Critical teaching is a crucial piece of deconstructing gender. One cannot fix a house without tools, nor can one expect a child to challenge gender norms when they are not given the tools to tackle them. Being able to dissect and question information is always a good thing. In music, we can do this by example: Showing videos where men are playing the flute and violin, while women play the bass, and the drums, would be very valuable. Sharing female composers, and composers of color would also be very valuable to challenging bias. Critical literacy pedagogy helps

students to learn to think critically, to form their own beliefs about a topic, and to question what they are reading or hearing, in general. This is a valuable tool in fighting any type of bias.

Capacity for Change— Conclusion

Frank Abrahams has studied critical pedagogy in music education extensively. He boils critical pedagogy in the music classroom down to four questions that a teacher should ask at every lesson: "Who am I? Who are my students? What might they become? What might we become together?" (Abrahams, 2005). Together, these are a fantastic framework for your teaching approach and have a more culturally responsive classroom as well. The two elements of critical pedagogy that Abrahams talks about are the "word to world" concept, and the concept of "conscientization." (Freire, 1973). The word to world concept stresses how educators can connect the world of the student to the material they are working on in the classroom. (Abrahams, 2005). It also invites the student to *bring* their world into the classroom. This allows for diversity of materials and instruction, but because it is *student* led, it transposes into a more meaningful scenario. For example, using the rhythm of a Lizzo song and then connecting it to a classical piece. Also, teaching them a favorite song, including the music of their culture and life will engage the student in many ways. With gender, representation is important. Making sure that the students are exposed to all types of composers and musicians. Conscientization involves the moment when a student "knows that they know." (Freire, 1973). That is a very powerful moment, and it means that they know what they are learning and where it connects socially, economically, and culturally as well. Brent Talbot (p.6, 2019) defines conscientization: "the human subject experiences and *reflects* upon the *limit-situations* that challenge understanding and then works with others to develop plans of *action* that address issues emerging from the

social, political, and economic disparities impacting our communities." It is an awakening of sorts, an understanding of the bigger picture and our place in it.

The format for teaching music with a critical pedagogy approach is very fluid. There are no formal curriculums, and the subject matter is flexible, dependent on teacher and student needs. "Critical pedagogy suggests that music, as part of our cultural past, present and future, has the power to liberate students and their teachers from present stereotypes about music and musicians, and encourages critical thinking, critical action, and critical feeling." (Abrahams, 2005, p.19). Abrahams breaks up his lessons into musical journeys starting with the exposition, development, flowing to an improvisation, and ending with the recapitulation. (Abrahams, 2005). These lessons are meant to have a deeper impact on the student and teacher, creating meaningful learning for both. Flipping the traditional lesson on its head, this is a breath of fresh air for many students who suffer under the banking approach. Talbot organizes reaching conscientization with three steps:

> "(1) *name* and *decode* how power and knowledge operates within systems of oppression, (2) *reflect* how we participate in and contribute to these systems and how these systems operate upon us, and (3) *act* and *resist* in both small and large ways in order to transform our world." (Talbot, p. 9).

As Ochoa and Pineda put it, "We had to debunk the myth of the classroom as a neutral space in which all students are equally centered and can participate freely." (p.59) This could not be truer. Not all students are treated the same, and the classroom in many places is NOT neutral. Simply recognizing this, and communicating it are key to fighting gender bias in any setting. It appears the banking model of education reinforces and solidifies the privileged social structure of race, gender, and socioeconomic status. *Using the classroom as a tool* to communicate and tackle this inequity is the best option. Giving students *the tools* of critical teaching techniques, where they are trained to question and actively engage is paramount. Critical literacy pedagogy is another very

important approach to addressing biases in the classroom and arming students with skills to address biases in life. There are also the older methods many teachers have used: Piece selection, peer modeling, or video examples of representation. In my opinion these seem more of a band aid, when compared with critical teaching techniques. More research is needed on critical teaching regarding music education, and it is an exciting new avenue to explore. It is my wish that anyone who reads this tries some of these techniques and I truly hope they help you on your teaching journey.

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Appendix A

Procedure

Class 1 :

First, the teacher hands out the questionnaire and gives it to the students.

Questionnaire:

What is music?

How does it make you feel?

Who decides what music is?

Next, the teacher plays portions of various pieces for the students. After each piece the teacher asks:

T: Is this music? Can you describe how it makes you feel? Each child writes their answer on the same questionnaire after each selection.

Piece 1- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8vdFesRSfuk

Piece 2- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7O_3q-ZttQ (skipping intro)

Piece 3- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTJfITfbYNA (select a clip)

Piece 4 - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ZQqu8M-EGs

T. and S. discuss answers and T writes some notes on the board to revisit the next lesson. Acknowledge transformation.

*Note: In his lesson model, Abrahams talks about "Acknowledging transformation." (Abrahams, 2005). Here is where we will acknowledge what we have learned and how we have grown.

Homework assignment:

T. tasks the students with starting the same discussion with a family member or other adult before the next class to encourage critical thinking outside the classroom. Bring in your answers.

Class 2:

Class discussion on asking family members about what music is, and some of their answers. T. writes on the board for clarity, and revisits comments from last class.

Next, Teacher hands out questionnaire:

What is music?

How does it make you feel?

Who decides what music is?

The teacher then acknowledges transformation: No one gets to tell you what is or what isn't good or bad. This is for YOU to decide.

Second half of class T. starts to discuss Clara Schumann. T. explains that she is a talented composer and performer. She was a child prodigy and performed many concerts throughout her life.

Students listen to 2 examples of her music, and then learn a short melody composed by Mrs. Schumann.

Class 3:

Class discussion:

Do you remember the female composer we spoke about last class?

Clara Schumann! Students review the two examples of Clara's music.

This is what life was like for Clara in the 1800s, when she lived:

In the 1800s, women usually stayed at home. They cleaned the house and cooked and sewed. They did not often go out to work and many girls did not go to school. Women from very poor families worked as servants. Women had big, long dresses in the 1800s so it was difficult to play sports. It was not possible for them to wear pants in those days. Some women skated or played tennis in their long skirts, but it was not easy. There were no sports for women at the first Olympic Games in Athens in 1896. In 1900, there were just two sports open to women: tennis and golf. Not many girls went to school. No women went to university. Universities were for men only. The University of Iowa was the first American university to open its doors to women in 1855. Women could not vote until 1920, so they did not have much of a say in society.

Class discussion: Can you imagine trying to work and live as a woman at this time?

Class activity: Stand if you could have gone to school in the 1800s. Stand if you were allowed to vote in the 1800s. Stand if you could secure a job in the 1800s. Stand if you were allowed to play sports in the 1800s. Stand if you could go to college in the 1800s.

Class discussion.

Questionnaire:

What challenges did Clara Schumann face?

When you think of a composer do you think of a man or a woman?

Who is capable of being a composer?

Class 4

T. opens the class with video clips:

A girl playing the string bass. A boy playing the violin. A girl playing the drums. A boy playing the flute.

Questionnaire :

Are there instruments that only girls should play and only boys should play?

Who decides who should play which instrument?

Class discussion :

After Clara Schumann lived, in the late 1800s, that is when women were allowed to be in an orchestra. Before that most of the orchestras were men only. Still for a long time only women could join women's orchestras. Men and women did not play together.

Once women were finally allowed to join major orchestras, the instruments they played were discussed:

Sir Henry Wood, a famous conductor at the time, after taking on a number of women violinists, said: "I do not like ladies playing the trombone or double bass, but they can play the violin, and they do."

It was founded in 1842, but the Vienna Philharmonic did not allow women to be 'full' members until 1997, after years of male members of the orchestra insisting that accepting women would lower their musical standards.

In 2014, American orchestras were, on average, made up of 63 percent men and 37 percent women.

Now we repeat the Questionnaire:

Are there instruments that only girls should play and only boys should play?

Who decides who should play which instrument?

Who made the rules about women only playing certain instruments?

Acknowledging transformation as a group.

No one is allowed to tell someone what they should or shouldn't play.

Appendix B

Here I will be presenting additional different techniques, methods, phrases, and tools that teachers can incorporate into their classrooms to combat gender bias using critical pedagogy. These are recommendations of activities for you to use and tweak as you desire.

Language—Critical Pedagogy Approach

A lot of what we do in music is skill based. We have no choice but to use the banking approach in order to teach certain techniques, but we do not have to use it *all* the time. It can make critical pedagogy difficult to "fit" into the music classroom. Here are some ways to teach critical thinking in the music classroom, which will help to deconstruct bias. I will be using these this Spring throughout my teaching. Each activity offers the student the means to create, perform, and respond while learning the necessary critical thinking tools to deconstruct bias.

**Note: I am writing these from the perspective of a strings teacher who teaches at the Elementary Level.*

Example 1:

Ask questions and facilitate a dialogue about music, teaching critical thinking skills:

Teacher asks: Why is Beethoven important? Or not?

What music is important to you? Why?

Assignment: Have each student pick a song to share (Appropriate or safe lyrics a must) and bring to class. Have them pick 3 reasons why this music is important. Teacher/Class will facilitate a discussion. Teacher will pick one piece a month to pass out and learn as a group.

Students and teacher will perform the song once learned. (In class, or video performance an option.)

Follow up Lesson: What did you learn? What has value in this music for you? Do other famous composers use it? (T. can offer examples, connecting the "greats" to the student's choice)

In his lesson model, Abrahams talks about "Acknowledging transformation." (Abrahams, 2005). Here is where we will acknowledge what we have learned and how we have grown.

Example 2:

Ask questions and facilitate a dialogue about music and gender, teaching critical thinking skills:

Teacher plays musical examples: Classical- Clara Schumann

Jazz- Nina Simone/ Rock- Joan Jett/ Pop- Lizzo/ Rap- Queen Latifah

Question: Did a man or a woman write these songs? What do you think? Class discussion.

T. eventually answers the students: They are all written by women! Did you know that there are many who used to say that women cannot compose as well as men? Class discussion.

T. plays a little song. Guess who wrote this? Me!

ALL people are capable of composing.

Assignment: Find one female composer to share with the class next lesson.

Assignment 2: COMPOSE something. Teacher sends home an 8 measure exercise, where the student can notate a song using the notes of the D major scale, with simple rhythms.

In class, students perform their compositions.

Follow up Lesson: What did we learn about composing? Who is capable of composing a song?

Acknowledging transformation as a group.

Example 3:

Exploring the music of other cultures

Today we are going to learn about Afro-Cuban music. In particular, the music of Celia Cruz. She is the Queen of Salsa! Class discussion on Salsa music. Teacher plays examples.

Teacher: "Celia Cruz moved to the U.S. in the 1960s. Imagine for a second that this was how life was. If you were a woman, you would have to stay home and have babies and clean the house. Nobody really had a job outside of their home. If you were black, you had to sit at the back of the bus, you had to use a different water fountain, you couldn't go to school with white kids. If you were from another country, people frowned upon you for not speaking English. Celia Cruz was black, she was a woman, and she spoke Spanish. There were three strikes against Celia, and she still became the Queen of Salsa." (Hess, 2017, 178).

Assignment: Listen to some Celia Cruz!

Assignment 2: Students begin practicing a melody written by Celia.

In class we perform her music.

Follow up lesson: What challenges did Celia face? What does her music mean to you?

Acknowledging transformation as a group.